

# Anger, Fear, Depression, and Passion: Approaches to Teaching in Selected Academic Novels

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**Abstract:** The article discusses selected academic novels (*Lucky Jim*, *The History Man*, *Changing Places*, *The Professor of Desire*, *Disgrace*, *Submission*) from the perspective of more recent pedagogic literature (Tompkins, Palmer, Brookfield, Showalter). It focuses on approaches to teaching, roughly dividing them into fear-driven, anger-driven and passion-driven (problems with this typology are noted), both in the relevant literary works and in theoretical literature. The main question is how academic teachers relate to their students and how this affects the teaching/learning process. Special emphasis is placed on problems related to teaching literature.

**Keywords:** academic novel, teaching literature, image of the teacher, teacher-student relations

## Introduction: reading academic fiction from the perspective of pedagogic literature

The present article is an attempt to look at academic novels from the perspective of pedagogic literature (Tompkins, Palmer, Brookfield, Showalter) in order to demonstrate its relevance to the problems faced by such literary characters as Jim Dixon, Howard Kirk, Morris Zapp, David Lurie or David Kepesh, which are no different from the problems that academic teachers face in real life. In particular I am going to focus on how those characters relate as teachers to their students and how this affects the teaching/learning process. Although pedagogic literature is not the most obvious context against which academic fiction is read, the main reason being that academic novels often seem to devote surprisingly little attention to teaching, focusing instead on love-life difficulties or struggle for power within academe, I believe that this approach might render valuable insights both into the genre and into teaching itself. In other words, pedagogic literature can enrich our understanding of academic fiction, and academic fiction could enrich our understanding of pedagogy.

It may be argued that insofar as academic fiction is about teachers, it *is* implicitly about teaching even when it does not seem to be about teaching. Parker J. Palmer, whose ideas I will frequently refer to, emphasizes that the ultimate success in teaching does not depend on technique but on the teacher's integrity and identity, which is sadly neglected in the public debate:

The question we most commonly ask is the “what” question – what subjects shall we teach? When the conversation goes a bit deeper, we ask the “how” question – what methods and techniques are required to teach well? Occasionally, when it goes deeper still, we ask the “why” question – for what purpose and to what ends do we teach? But seldom, if ever, do we ask the “who” question – who is the self that teaches? How does the quality of my selfhood form – or deform – the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world? (Introduction)<sup>64</sup>

Interestingly enough, academic fiction has always explored the problem of teaching from this angle. It has delved deep into the teachers' hearts and minds, endeavoring to ascertain the reasons of the characters' success or, more often, failure both as teachers and human beings.

### **Reflection on teaching: fear-driven vs. anger-driven teaching**

What deforms the way teachers relate to their students, their subjects, or their colleagues? Elaine Showalter, following Paul Ramsden,<sup>65</sup> answers: first it's fear, then anger:

“When people believe they cannot make a favorable impression on an audience, social anxiety is felt,” he [Paul Ramsden] writes.

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64 This approach is not new; Parker's words echo Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous statement from “The Oversoul”: “That which we are, we shall teach, not voluntarily but involuntarily” (1985, 217), but in the current technocratic era which attempts to reduce the complexities of teaching to easily quantifiable data and the simple correct-incorrect opposition, they may come as a revelation.

65 Showalter refers to Paul Ramsden's *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*. I have checked both editions of Ramsden's book and the passage which Showalter marks as a quotation from Ramsden is in neither of them.

He goes on to note, however, "On the other hand, when people are confident in their ability to make the right impression but see their audience as unappreciative, anger will be felt.... For college teachers, these theories predict that over their professional lives, they will be inclined to fear students early in their careers and despise them later in their careers." (Showalter 1999)

Jane Tompkins associates fear-driven teaching with the dominant performance model, which she denounces in her article "Pedagogy of the Distressed":

Whereas, for my entire teaching life, I had always thought that what I was doing was helping my students to understand the material we were studying – Melville or deconstruction or whatever – I had finally realized that what I was actually concerned with and focused on most of the time were three things: a) to show the students how smart I was, b) to show them how knowledgeable I was, and c) to show them how well-prepared I was for class. I had been putting on a performance whose true goal was not to help the students learn but to perform before them in such a way that they would have a good opinion of me. I think that this essentially, and more than anything else, is what we teach our students: how to perform within an institutional academic setting in such a way that they will be thought highly of by their colleagues and instructors. (1990, 654)

Tompkins indicates that the performance model is based on the fear that one is not smart enough, knowledgeable enough, or well-prepared enough. Naturally, these fears are much more intense in the case of inexperienced teachers who have just entered adult life.

### **Jim Dixon as an example of fear-driven teaching**

The archetypal example of fear-driven teaching is Jim Dixon from *Lucky Jim*. His extreme anxiety as a college instructor, however, is not only a result of his seeming lack of academic or teaching skills. It is part of a larger problem which has to do with his social background and the educational and economic system;

he is a lower-middle class man confused and annoyed by the intricate rites of upper-middle class academe. The fact that he has to pretend to be someone that he is not makes it impossible for him to develop a meaningful and constructive relationship with his students. He either fears them (Michie) or desires them (Miss O'Shaughnessy, Miss McCorquodale, and Miss ap Rhys Williams). His very survival at the university depends on the whim of Professor Welch, so pleasing the Professor is much more important than succeeding as a teacher. Kingsley Amis's novel is a powerful indictment of this pathological quasi-feudal arrangement which deforms the individual and makes authentic teaching, or even authentic conversation, virtually impossible.

When Welch mentions a book by a friend of his, Jim needs to respond in a way that will not reveal his ignorance but at the same time will not suggest that he has anything interesting to say regarding this publication:

Dixon said 'Oh yes' in a different tone, but still guardedly. He wanted to indicate eager and devout recognition that should not at the same time imply first-hand knowledge of the work in question, in case Welch should demand an epitome of its argument. (Amis 1961, 81)

A similar communication failure is described in Jane Smiley's novel *Moo*:

When the teacher tried to widen the discussion by asking what the others thought about the difference between "students" and "customers," Sherri had maintained the same appearance of benign ignorance and noncommittal good will that the other freshmen had. (Smiley 2009, chap. 35)

In a system in which maintaining face is paramount, people will refuse to engage in a dialogue so as not to expose themselves.

A specific product of the fear-driven teaching is the phenomenon described by Palmer as the student from hell. Jim Dixon meets his in the form of Michie:

Michie knew a lot, or seemed to, which was as bad. One of the things he knew, or seemed to, was what scholasticism was. Dixon read, heard, and even used the word a dozen times a day without knowing, though he seemed to. But he saw clearly that he wouldn't

be able to go on seeming to know the meaning of this and a hundred such words while Michie was there questioning, discussing, and arguing about them. Michie was, or seemed, able to make a fool of him again and again without warning. (Amis 1961, 28-29)

The student from hell personifies the teacher's deepest fears. In Dixon's case it is the fear of not being able to pretend to be somebody that he is not – a knowledgeable scholar, an expert on medieval philosophy – and, as a result, of being publicly humiliated.

### **The motif of the student from hell in academic fiction**

The student from hell happens to be a popular topos in academic fiction, both new and old. Its popularity is further proof that fear-driven teaching is a widespread phenomenon. As a literary device the student from hell is used to engineer a form of anagnorisis, although the actual recognition may be delayed. Typically, the protagonist finds a particular student problematic; during the inevitable confrontation the protagonist learns something important about himself/herself, or the reader learns something important about the protagonist.

Chip Lambert from Jonathan Franzen's *Corrections* (2001) meets his student from hell in Melissa Pacquette (who will be the reason why he will have to leave academe in disgrace). Lambert insists that he teaches his students not his personal opinions but methods of objective analysis of textual artefacts; however, Melissa accuses him of teaching them to hate the things that he hates (Franzen 2002, 48).

Howard Kirk from Malcolm Bradbury's *History Man*, who for my purposes is a more interesting character to discuss, meets his nemesis in the person of George Carmody. Kirk, who is in fact a Professor from Hell, hates George, a perfectly ordinary student, because he is so ordinary, does not want to experiment, does not want to change. George testifies to Kirk's failure as a pedagogue as Kirk takes special pride in his ability to transform most ordinary "anal" (1985, 132) students into revolutionaries and anarchists, who would "march down the street [...], and sign [...] petitions, and hit policemen on [...] demos" (134). But George resists the professor's magic. What exasperates the progressive professor is that George does not seem even to make an effort to look like a revolutionary, which is reflected in his physical appearance: neat haircut, perfectly clean shave,

a university blazer with a badge, a university tie, white shirt, brightly polished shoes, and a shining briefcase to top everything. Every social radical is bound to find such a sight truly despicable.

He is an item, preserved in some extraordinary historical pickle, from the nineteen-fifties or before; he comes out of some strange fold in time. He has always been like this, and at first his style was a credit; wasn't it just a mock-style to go with all the other mock-styles in the social parody? But this is the third year; he has been out of sight for months, and here he is again, and he has renewed the commitment; the terrible truth seems clear. It is no joke; Carmody wants to be what he says he is. (Bradbury 1985, 131)

To add insult to injury, Carmody keeps addressing Professor Kirk as "sir". For Howard Kirk all this is very personal – a form of the return of the repressed. George reminds Kirk of his own humble beginnings, his own struggle with his social background, everything that he managed to free himself from in order to become a liberated thinker and that he now yearns to destroy for good – in short, the false consciousness of the petty bourgeoisie.

These two examples might throw some light on the function of the motif of the student from hell in academic fiction and further demonstrate how personal bias deforms the teacher's relation both to his students and his subject. However, the decision to include fearless Professor Kirk, a seasoned veteran of many university battles, in the category of fear-driven teaching is highly controversial. To justify it I would like to reexamine the concept of the student from hell and the typical development of the career of a college teacher.

### Teaching anxiety

Palmer relates the encounter with his Student from Hell in the following, highly amusing manner:

The Student from Hell is a universal archetype that can take male or female form; mine happened to be male. His cap was pulled down over his eyes so that I could not tell whether they were open or shut. His notebooks and writing instruments were nowhere

to be seen. It was a fine spring day, but his jacket was buttoned tight, signifying readiness to bolt at any moment.

What I remember most vividly is his posture. Though he sat in one of those sadistic classroom chairs with a rigidly attached desk, he had achieved a position that I know to be anatomically impossible: despite the interposed desk, his body was parallel to the floor. Seeking desperately to find even one redeeming feature in the specter before me, I seized on the idea that he must practice the discipline of hatha yoga to be able to distort his body so completely. (Palmer 2007, chap. 2)

Since Palmer relied in his teaching on the feedback from students, his student from hell was a student who refused to participate. But Palmer's story had a happy ending. After the class he accidentally met the boy, talked to him, learned about the boy's problems and put things in perspective. More importantly, he learned something about himself; he realized what he was afraid of. He had two fears: the fear that he would not be popular with the young, and the fear that he would not be able to communicate successfully with them. Parker writes,

Day after day, year after year, we walk into classrooms and look into younger faces that seem to signal, in ways crude and subtle, "You're history. Whatever you value, we don't – and since you couldn't possibly understand the things we value, we won't even bother to try to tell you what they are. We are here only because we are forced to be here. So whatever you have to do, get it over with, and let us get on with our lives." (Palmer 2007, chap. 2)

It may be worth indicating that Palmer's encounter with the student from hell took place when Palmer was in his fifties; he was not a novice but an academic teacher with an established reputation, acknowledged and respected by his peers. This shows that a certain form of fear is bound to accompany teachers till the end of their professional careers, no matter how experienced or successful they are. Palmer calls the first fear "pathological" and hopes to be able to get rid of it as it leads him to lose his dignity and pander to students, instead of serving them well. The other fear is, however, a natural anxiety that his job as a teacher should be meaningful. He wants to keep it. Getting rid of it would mean giving up (Palmer 2007, chap. 2).

The fact that the experience of fear is not a stage that one outgrows during one's development as a teacher is also confirmed by Elaine Showalter's *Teaching Literature*. In the opening chapter Showalter relates various anxiety dreams of academic teachers of international renown. Apparently, Wayne Booth was haunted by a dream in which he, browsing through a catalogue, realized that he was supposed to teach in Latin. He was devastated. "I cannot teach in Latin," he thought. "Now, they would discover that I am a fraud" (Showalter 2003, 2). Jane Tompkins (the author of "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" and *A Life in School*) dreamt that her students walked out on her (Showalter 2003, 2). Showalter herself had a nightmare about having forgotten to teach one of her assigned classes. In her dream, it's the middle of the semester. She panics and rushes to teach the forgotten class. The students miraculously are still waiting in the room but she has no idea how to excuse herself or what to teach them (Showalter 2003, 1). Showalter's husband, who taught French literature, had a recurrent dream in which he lectured very confidently until he discovered that there was another lecturer in the same room and that all the students completely ignored him and focused on the other guy (Showalter 2003, 1).

It may be interesting to note that in some of those dreams (Booth, Showalter) typical teaching anxieties (the desire to perform well in the classroom) are combined with "organizational" anxieties, which reveal that university is not a smoothly running institution. In Booth's and Showalter's dreams the university acquires a Kafkaesque quality: courses are assigned arbitrarily, the teaching schedule is not transparent, nobody seems to be interested whether a given course is taught or not. Those dreams could be treated as reminders that teaching does not take place in a void but in a certain system, which, as *Lucky Jim* indicates, could be seriously flawed. And the system in which one functions is bound to affect one's performance.

In light of the fact that some kind of fear is always there, it remains problematic whether the neat opposition between fear-driven and anger-driven teaching may be maintained. Anger could be viewed as a coping mechanism, a means to displace fear, with anger-driven teaching being a variant of fear-driven teaching.

### **Morris Zapp – the problem of the choice between students and subject**

Morris Zapp in David Lodge's *Changing Places* is probably the best-known literature professor in fiction. I would like to apply the theory of fear-driven teaching to him to see what it will tell us about his persona.



Professor Zapp is a successful scholar, an authority on Jane Austen, and a popular teacher, at least at the State University of Euphoria. One student made the following comment about his course on *Jane Austen and the Theory of Fiction*: “He makes Austen swing” (Lodge 2011, chap. 2). He teaches in a manner which suggests that he is “confident in [his] ability to make the right impression” (Showalter 1999). When he finds his audience unappreciative or unresponsive, which when he moves to England seems to be the rule, he is eager to blame them for his own failure. These characteristics meet the definition of anger-driven teaching. But Morris Zapp, despite all his apparent successes, is not free from anxiety:

Jane Austen was certainly not the writer to win the hearts of the new generation. Sometimes Morris woke sweating from nightmares in which students paraded round the campus carrying placards that declared KNIGHTLEY SUCKS and FANNY PRICE IS A FINK. (Lodge 2011, chap. 1)

Similarly to Palmer, being an ambitious teacher, he takes it badly when students do not reciprocate his passion for literature. He is genuinely frightened that students might consider his cherished author completely irrelevant to their lives, which would mean that teaching Austen is a waste of time. Hence his insistence that “liking” and “not liking” have nothing to do with the proper study of literature. He constantly reminds his students that such “whimsicalities” are “of no conceivable interest to anyone except themselves” (Lodge 2011, chap. 1). This may be interpreted as an attempt to forestall the dreaded comments that “KNIGHTLEY SUCKS and FANNY PRICE IS A FINK”. In the eyes of Professor Zapp, such comments are a result of a fairly typical misunderstanding, the naïve assumption that one should like the literary works that one studies.

Zapp’s case indicates a problem that many literature teachers face. In a sense they have to choose between their subject and their students. Either they prioritize the interests of their students, slow down and simplify the material in order to teach what they think their students may understand, or they follow the curriculum and their intellectual ambitions irrespective of whether the students are still with them or not. Unfortunately, the first option, which seems to make more sense as literature courses arguably focus on developing soft skills rather than

conveying hard knowledge that students absolutely need to master, might also mean doing violence to the teacher's self – the teacher may be forced to teach a course that does not give him or her any intellectual satisfaction.

Zapp chooses his subject and the integrity of his self, and has little patience with his students, to whose level he will not stoop. Similarly to Howard Kirk, he wants to break them and remold after his own image, which is evidenced by the following classroom interaction. Zapp asks,

"What was the topic?"

"I've done it on Jane Austen's moral awareness."

"That doesn't sound like my style."

"I couldn't understand the title you gave me, Professor Zapp."

"Eros and Agape in the later novels, wasn't it? What was the problem?"

The student hung his head. Morris felt in the mood for a little display of high-powered exposition. Agape, he explained, was a feast through which the early Christians expressed their love for one another, it symbolized non-sexual, non-individualized love, it was represented in Jane Austen's novels by social events that confirmed the solidarity of middle-class agrarian capitalist communities or welcomed new members into those communities – balls and dinner parties and sightseeing expeditions and so on. (Lodge 2011, chap. 5)

This is a tutorial where only three students are present. They listen "flabbergasted" to the lecturing professor, who only succeeds in intimidating them and ruins his chances of ever engaging them in a discussion. In England Zapp encounters additional culture and language barriers, separating him from his students, so this attitude is bound to lead to a teaching failure. This is how Zapp describes his typical seminar:

I'm listening like hell but can't understand a word because of the guy's limey accent. All too soon, he stops. "Thank you," I say, flashing him an appreciative smile. He looks at me reproachfully as he blows his nose, then carries on from where he paused, in mid-sentence. The other two students wake up briefly, exchange glances and snigger. That's the most animation they ever show.

When the guy reading the paper finally winds it up, I ask for comments. Silence. They avoid my eye. I volunteer a comment myself. Silence falls again. It's so quiet you can hear the guy's beard growing. Desperately I ask one of them a direct question. "And what did you think of the text, Miss Archer?" Miss Archer falls off her chair in a swoon. (Lodge 2011, chap. 3)

### Depressed professors

It may be contended that all these different approaches (Dixon's, Kirk's, Zapp's) are underlined by some anxiety, which the teachers manage to control better (Kirk, Zapp) or worse (Dixon). The teachers who do not experience anxiety are those who have already given up. This is what happens to some academics at the end of their careers. Their teaching is usually marked not by outright anger but by simmering resentment. Frequently they have given up not only on teaching but also on life. To use Thoreau's words, they "lead lives of quiet desperation". They despise their students, secretly or openly, see their numerous shortcomings but make no attempt to lessen them. Academic fiction knows this type very well. Arguably, nowadays this is the prevalent type.

I will restrict my discussion to two relatively recent examples. Professor David Lurie from J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* "has long ceased to be surprised at the range of ignorance of his students" (Coetzee 2000, 32). He does not feel any connection to them: "Post-Christian, posthistorical, postliterate, they might as well have been hatched from eggs yesterday" (Coetzee 2000, 32). They are part of the new world which has no appreciation for the things that he loves: Wordsworth, Byron, opera. He tries to do his job as best as he can, to perform his duties diligently, but

He has never been much of a teacher; in this transformed and, to his mind, emasculated institution of learning he is more out of place than ever. But then, so are other of his colleagues from the old days, burdened with upbringings inappropriate to the tasks they are set to perform; clerks in a post-religious age. Because he has no respect for the material he teaches, he makes no impression on his students. They look through him when he speaks, forget his name. (Coetzee 2000, 4)

Whenever he asks a question a long silence falls; invariably he has to answer it himself. He feels ignored, rejected ("he has published three books, none of which has caused a stir or even a ripple" [Coetzee 2000, 4]). His unfortunate sexual liaison with one of his students, Melanie, may be construed as a misguided attempt to overcome his isolation (now when he teaches there is at least this one person to whom he has something meaningful to say, to whom he can relate).

The other famous depressed professor is François from Michel Houellebecq's *Submission*. He shows little interest in his work:

My afternoon seminar was exhausting. Doctoral students tended to be exhausting. For them it was all just starting to mean something, and for me nothing mattered except which Indian dinner I'd microwave (Chicken Biryani? Chicken Tikka Masala? Chicken Rogan Josh?) while I watched the political talk shows on France 2. (Houellebecq 2015, chap. 1)

He has no illusions about the importance of the subject that he teaches (French literature):

The academic study of literature leads basically nowhere, as we all know, unless you happen to be an especially gifted student, in which case it prepares you for a career teaching the academic study of literature – it is, in other words, a rather farcical system that exists solely to replicate itself and yet manages to fail more than 95 per cent of the time. Still, it's harmless, and can even have a certain marginal value. A young woman applying for a sales job at Céline or Hermès should naturally attend to her appearance above all; but a degree in literature can constitute a secondary asset, since it guarantees the employer, in the absence of any useful skills, a certain intellectual agility that could lead to professional development – besides which, literature has always carried positive connotations in the world of luxury goods. (Houellebecq 2015, chap. 1)

He is a leading expert on Huysmans, but that does not seem to matter to him much, either. Now that he considers his sex life over, he wonders how he shall spend his remaining days:

You have to take an interest in something in life, I told myself. I wondered what could interest me, now that I was finished with love. I could take a course in wine tasting, maybe, or start collecting model aeroplanes. (Houellebecq 2015, chap. 1)

### David Kepesh – a passionate professor

A potential alternative to both fear-driven and depression-driven teaching could be passion-driven teaching demonstrated by young David Kepesh in Philip Roth's *The Professor of Desire*. Professor Kepesh eventually emerges triumphant from his personal ordeals (an unhappy marriage ending in divorce), meets the love of his life and with renewed energy plans his next year's seminar. In a hotel lounge in Prague Kepesh, eyed by local prostitutes, sketches his opening lecture. He does not want to teach his students about "narrative devices, metaphorical motifs, and mythical archetypes" (Roth 1994, 183); he wants to teach them "something of value about life" (Roth 1994, 184). Unlike Morris Zapp, who does not want the closed system of literature to be contaminated with "an open-ended system (life)" (Lodge 2011, chap. 1) and is determined to make the study of literature an exact science, purged of the element of the personal, Kepesh yearns to annihilate the difference separating literature from real life.

This has already been seen on the exam which he gave students at the end of the previous semester. In one of the exam tasks he asked his students to become "the writer's friend and biographer" and to describe "Kafka's moral isolation" and "his peculiarities of perspective and temperament" (Roth 1994, 166). Kepesh wanted his students to feel Kafka's "everyday struggles", and not to stray "into ingenious metaphysical exegesis" (Roth 1994, 166). He was pleased by the fact that many students chose this particular task and produced an essay free of standard literary terminology (Roth 1994, 166).

In his opening lecture Kepesh makes the following plea to his prospective students:

I am going to request nonetheless that you restrain yourselves from talking about "structure," "form," and "symbols" in my presence. It seems to me that many of you have been intimidated sufficiently by your junior year of college and should

be allowed to recover and restore to respectability those interests and enthusiasms that more than likely drew you to reading fiction to begin with and which you oughtn't to be ashamed of now. As an experiment you might even want during the course of this year to try living without any classroom terminology at all, to relinquish "plot" and "character" right along with those very exalted words with which not a few of you like to solemnize your observations, such as "epiphany," "persona," and, of course, "existential" as a modifier of everything existing under the sun, I suggest this in the hope that if you talk about *Madame Bovary* in more or less the same tongue you use with the grocer, or your lover, you may be placed in a more intimate, a more interesting, in what might even be called a more referential relationship with Flaubert and his heroine. (Roth 1994, 183)

This time, however, Professor Kepesh intends to go one step further. He wants to present himself, his former love life difficulties, as the first text to study in his seminar on erotic desire. He announces,

Indiscreet, unprofessional, unsavory as portions of these disclosures will surely strike some of you, I nonetheless would like, with your permission, to go ahead now and give an open account to you of the life I formerly led as a human being. (Roth 1994, 185)

Yet the novel ends before Professor Kepesh gets a chance to implement this wild plan, so we never learn how his students would react. In fact, we cannot know for sure whether he really means it; it could be his private fantasy or a thought experiment conducted to probe his inner feelings, something that is not supposed to be checked against the reality principle. What we do know, however, is that teaching literature constitutes the very purpose of Kepesh's life. He confesses,

I love teaching literature. I am rarely ever so contented as when I am here with my pages of notes, and my marked-up texts, and with people like yourselves. To my mind there is nothing quite like the classroom in all of life. (Roth 1994, 184)

Still, the passion-driven approach represented by Kepesh may be criticized for being too self-indulgent. Even Palmer, who is all in favor of making teaching more personal, notices the problem. He sums it up sententiously, “Reduce teaching to intellect, and it becomes a cold abstraction; reduce it to emotions, and it becomes narcissistic; reduce it to the spiritual, and it loses its anchor to the world” (Palmer 2007, Introduction). It may be symptomatic that Roth’s novel does not describe Kepesh teaching in the actual classroom but imagining himself teaching.

Stephen D. Brookfield’s much more level-headed book *Becoming a Self-Reflecting Teacher* indicates that students do not feel comfortable when the teacher attempts to shorten the distance too abruptly. This may be perceived both as an invasion of privacy and manipulation. The problem is particularly acute when the teacher is white and the students black, or the teacher is male and the students female (Brookfield 2017, 15). The teacher needs to accept, at least at the beginning, the status of “the other” and work slowly to get the group’s trust and acceptance rather than act on the wrong assumption that the classroom is a fully democratic place where everybody can freely share their stories and there is absolutely no need to feel any inhibitions. Brookfield notices that democracy in the classroom is at best a pleasant fiction and at worst a blatant lie, used to manipulate students and to disguise the real power structure.<sup>66</sup> He confesses,

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66 How seemingly democratic, liberating techniques turn out to be highly oppressive is masterfully shown in Bradbury’s *History Man*:

Watermouth makes students nervous; you never know quite what to expect. There are classes where you have, on arrival, to eat something, or touch each other, or recount last night’s dreams, or undress, in order to induce that strange secular community that is, in Watermouth terms, the essence of a good class, a class that is interesting. There are others where you have to sit and listen to tutors in self-therapy, talking about their problems or their wives or their need to relate; there are other classes where almost the reverse happens, and the students become objects of therapy, problem-bearers, and where an apparently casual remark about one’s schoolboy stamp collection, or a literary reference to the metaphoric significance of colour, will lead to a sudden psychic foray from a teacher who will dive down into your unconscious with three shrewd enquiries and come up clutching something in you called ‘bourgeois materialism’ or ‘racism’. [...] There are classes where the teacher, not wanting to direct the movement of mind unduly, will remain silent throughout the class, awaiting spontaneous explosions of intelligence from his students; there are classes, indeed, where the silence never gets broken. (Bradbury 1985, 128)

When power is concerned I've become aware of many instances in which I thought I was working in ways that students found empowering and supportive only to discover the opposite was the case. Actions and practices I believed to be unequivocally democratizing were experienced as manipulative surveillance. (Brookfield 2017, 28)

In reality, no matter whether the chairs are arranged in a circle or not, power always resides in the teacher, who will eventually grade students. In reality, usually it is the teacher who speaks freely whereas the students are forced to listen, whether they want it or not. If students dare to speak out they will feel upon themselves the teacher's censorious gaze. In this respect Kepesh, preoccupied with his own self, may be making the same mistake as Morris Zapp or Howard Kirk, that is, he fails to recognize his students as individuals who have their own needs and problems. The – most likely – predominately female students of Kepesh's seminar on erotic desire in literature could be genuinely terrified by the strange professor, who, in complete disregard of social and academic conventions, on their very first meeting forces upon them a story of his sexual frustrations.

## Conclusion

The characters discussed above illustrate a number of important truths about teaching. They show how teachers disguise and displace their anxieties, and how it affects the way they relate to their students. Many of those anxieties cannot be helped by better professional training as they are directly connected to who a given individual is and what he or she believes, or does not believe (as Palmer argues, "We teach what we are"). Professional training certainly will not help David Lurie or François, who showcase what dangers academics confront at the end of their careers. As they struggle against old age, boredom and ennui, their situation is further exacerbated by the seeming crisis of the humanities and the gradual loss of prestige of literary studies. The latter is important as anxieties felt by teachers are also related to the socioeconomic problems of the big world. Economic insecurity (Dixon) or certain class anxiety (Dixon, Kirk) could be important factors affecting teaching.

Relating to students is never easy. Both lack of confidence, a typical affliction of beginning teachers (Dixon, Lambert), and overconfidence (Kirk, Zapp,



Kepesh) can be a problem. Teachers need to respect both their own and their students' boundaries.

Finally, as has been seen, there is no consensus among literary characters as to what end literature should be taught, which reflects a similar lack of consensus in real life. Morris Zapp teaches literature for the sake of literature, whereas David Kepesh wants the study of literature to make a difference in his students' lives.

To conclude, academic fiction shows us complicated lives of academic teachers in different stages of their careers; it does not give us a straightforward answer to the question how to teach but it certainly offers very rich material for pedagogic reflection.

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